DISPLAY OF VIOLENCE THROUGH CULTURAL CODES IN TURKISH TV SERIALS: A STUDY ON THREE TURKISH SERIALS

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Abstract: The concept of violence mainly comprises the use of brutal force and fierceness. The acts of violence; on the other hand, can be defined as the practices pertaining to intimidating, terrorizing and even tyrannizing human beings. Violence as one of research areas in sociology has recently attracted a great interest among sociologists and also some other researches in social sciences. In general, all these researchers submitted various classification of violence to the area and the common point in these was the fact that violence had been changing according to the society and the historical period that researchers dealt with. It is also clear from these researches that an individual learns violent behavior through his or her education; more clearly during their socialization process. There is a widespread agreement on the idea that a healthy and balanced society necessitates the conscious contribution of each member to the solution of social, economic and cultural problems. Undoubtedly, the mass media, particularly TV, plays a significant role in this process. In the same way, the media content considerably accelerates the respective learning process through news, advertisements and particularly TV serials. In other words, mass communication plays a vital role in accelerating the behavioral changes in a society.

This study focuses on the question whether or not the violence displayed in popular Turkish TV serials might develop a potential for desensitization to violence. With this idea in mind, the primary purpose of this study is to find out the rate of violence demonstrated in the respective serials. Thus, three popular TV serials with the highest rating have been determined as the corpus of this study. Then, every sixth episode of each serial in a 36 –week- season has been chosen as the sampling. Totally, 18 episodes have been examined with content analysis method regarding the display of violence in various forms.

Keywords: violence, TV serials, media, content analysis, display of violence in Turkish TV serials.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of violence mainly comprises the use of brutal force and fierceness. The acts of violence can be defined as the practices pertaining to intimidating, terrorizing and even tyrannizing human beings. Defined as "a *way of action ... based on the power physically and materially to hurt other creatures or to be harmed"* ("Violence," n.d.), the meaning of violence can be extended to *"the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse"* or *"injury by ... distortion, infringement, or profanation"* (ibid.), Violence refers to killing, doing intentional harm, destroying, robbing, expelling as the five basic forms. Standing out especially, killing appears as the extreme limit of violence (ibid.). Overall, violence refers to both the use of physical force intended to bring about destruction, injury or harm and also the exhibition of unjustified, wrongful and illicit actions meant to daunt and dismay.

Florea (2013) discusses that violence has so far been an indispensable part of our lives and asserts that either as children or adults, we can be seen frequently every day. It does not matter if we are children or adults, we might be the "*aggressors, victims or witnesses of an aggression*" (p. 350). Indeed as a consequence of political, economic or social reasons, in today's world any incident might easily trigger deep-rooted aggression.

Inside of the social domain, brutality is utilized as a part of a wide range of connections, dispensing damage upon people, groups, societies and physical situations (Perez, 2009, qtd. in Guggisberg and Weir, 2009a).

Furthermore, Ross (2004: 1) discusses that being a ubiquitous concept; violence influences individuals, institutions and social practices in contemporary society. In this sense, brutality takes numerous structures, some

of them unmistakable, and some more subtle. The utilization of "reasonable" physical power in specific situations and certain socially characterized standards has long been considered suitable by those who determine the respective standards and to apply the power. In the same way, the use of 'reasonable' physical force under certain circumstances and within certain culturally defined norms has long been deemed appropriate by those empowered both to define those norms and to apply the force.

Noteworthy, McLuhan (1977, qtd in Schorr, 1983: 5)[i] draws attention to the relationship between violence and identity that violence is one of the manifestations of the quest for identity. When you have lost your identity, you become a violent person looking for identity.

Highlighting the vital role that violence plays in today's world as the least difficult and least expensive sensational means accessible to exhibit the tenets of force, Gerbner and Gross (1976: 183), further draw attention to the point that "in real life much violence is subtle, slow, circumstantial, invisible, even impersonal. Encounters with physical violence in real life are rare, more sickening than thrilling. But in the symbolic world, overt physical motion makes dramatically visible that which in the real world is usually hidden." In this sense, "symbolic violence" (ibid.) assumes the role of genuine brutality all the more efficiently and enjoyably.

Gerbner and Gross (1973: 3) also point out that "television dominates the prevailing climate of the mass-produced symbolic environment. Its dramatic programs (plays, films, cartoon) cultivate synthetic images of life, society, and the world…Never before, have such a large and heterogeneous publics…shared so much of a system of messages and images and the assumptions embedded in them."

Moreover, Gerbner et al. [1980: 11-12 qtd in Mustonen and Pulkkinen, 1993] characterized violence as the plain expression of physical power, furthermore included trials and undermining with viciousness in the definition. Likewise, Williams et al. [1982, 366 qtd. ibid.] likewise included mental types of viciousness in the examination.

In fact, violence arises in various ways through the mass media. Apart from the TV programs that reflect reality or rather convey it through a structuring process, representations of violence are observed in newspapers, magazines, music etc. In the same way, violence can be noticed in toys and video games. In addition to all these, movies set up a category themselves. Moreover, the Internet content including particularly pornography as well as computer games can be mentioned. Generally, when the media texts, with a focus their contents, is considered, hardly any display where there is no visual representation of violence can be found (Yanikkaya, 2009). At this point, there seems to be a little opportunity to escape from the content potentially emanating violence.

A study conducted by Jamieson and Romer (2014: 32) on the basis of Gerbner and Gross's cultivation theory indicate that "contrary to the prediction that TV violence would affect perceptions of crime rates, TV violence directly predicted fear of crime holding constant national crime rates and perceptions of crime rates" Television dramatization carries viewers towards a fictive reality that creates dread without transforming "perceptions of a mean world".

II. Method

This study focuses on the question whether or not the violence displayed in popular Turkish TV serials might develop a potential for violence. With this idea in mind, the primary purpose of this study is to find out the ratio of violence demonstrated in the three popular Turkish TV serials, namely *Poyraz Karayel* (*Northeaster - Northwester*), *Şeref Meselesi* (*Matter of Honor*) and *Ask Yeniden* (*Love, Once Again*) have been determined as the universe of this study. Our aim is to analyze the aspects of TV violence in qualitative direction.

In this study the effects of cultural codes on violence have been examined in five categories based on the classification introduced by New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence ("The Five Forms of Domestic Violence") and extended with more elaborate definitions of violence in order not to miss any aspects of violence during the analysis of the serials. The main categories are economic, emotional, physical, psychological and sexual.

Thus, duration of the scenes displaying the respective forms of violence has been recorded and classified according to the determined categories. Then, the ratio of violence for each category has been calculated and charted. As a second dimension; on the other hand, the direction of violence has also been examined in the forms of man-to-man, man-to-woman-woman-to-man, woman-to-woman, adult-to-child and child-to-adult.

Violence in economic sense can be characterized as an attempt to make somebody fiscally subordinate concerning the activities relating to disallowing participation at school, constrained welfare extortion, denying vocation, keeping up aggregate control over budgetary assets including casualty's earned wage or assets got through open help or government disability, malevolently requiring responsibility and legitimization for all cash spent, at work provocation, withholding cash

and/or access to cash and also data about family giving bills to which some individual is in charge of installment.

Furthermore, emotional violence consists of disparaging some person's capacities and competency, consistent feedback, constrained welfare, misrepresenttation, abuse and put-downs, verbal abusing, controlling somebody's sentiments and feelings to actuate blame, over and again making and breaking promises, quiet treatment, subverting a partner's association with the youngsters.

As probably the most prevailing form, physical violence is held mainly in two categories: inflicting or aiming to perpetrate physical harm and withholding access to assets important to well-being. While the acts of "arm-twisting, biting, grabbing, hitting (along with the use of blunt objects), kicking, punching, shooting, shoving, slapping and stabbing" ("The Five Forms of Domestic Violence") are taken into consideration for the former, "Withholding access to resources...pertaining to medication, food or fluids, hygienic assistance, sleep, medical care, forcing alcohol or other drug use" (ibid.) are regarded for the former sub-category. Moreover, self-abuse and suicide are also considered in self-directed violence category.

Psychological violence; on the other hand has been examined with regard to two main actions, namely infusing fear and cutting somebody off from his or her school, work, family or friends. More particularly, the actions in the respective serials demonstrating blackmailing, intentional harm towards pets and property, tormenting, intimidation, threatening, playing brain games, stalking, threatening with self-directed physical damage as well as harm to children in addition to constant surveillance and accompaniment, forced detention, harassing, subverting aggrieved party's personal relationships, use of unsubstantiated accusations, withholding access to any means of communication and transportation.

Finally, for sexual violence basically two types of actions; firstly, subverting the aggrieved party's sexuality through unfounded allegations of infidelity, finding fault with his or her sexual performance and desirability, treating somebody in a sexually humiliating manner and intentionally Refraining from sex; secondly, with regard to compelling sexual contact without consent: attacks on the sexual parts of the body, caressing, forced sex following physical assault as well as compulsion towards prostitution, rape and sodomy.

III. FINDINGS

An overall evaluation indicates that the highest form of violence displayed in the serials within the scope of this study is psychological (50,3 %), which is followed by physical (29,7 %), emotional (17 %), economic (2,3 %) and sexual (0,3 %) as shown in Fig. 1.
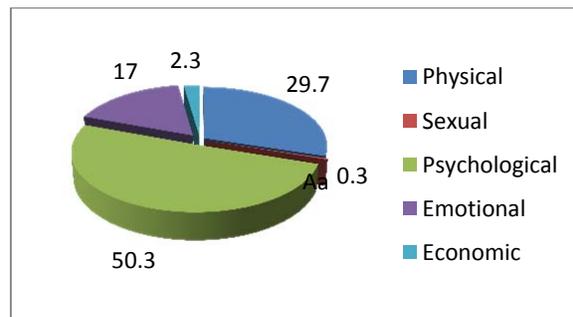

Fig. 1 Forms of Violence

Considering the extensive use of the themes instilling or attempting to instill fear along with Isolating or attempting to isolate somebody from friends, family, school, and/or work, the ratio of psychological violence appears to be quite high. Moreover, as a result of an indispensable part of the popular Turkish serials even the romantic ones, the actions intended to inflict physical injury as well as withhold access to resources necessary to maintain health are the second most frequently exposed scenes. As the third noticeable category, emotional violence is seen in the form of undermining or attempting to undermine somebody's sense of worth. Emotional violence has a quite low ratio in the sense of making or attempting to make someone financially dependent. Interestingly enough, sexual violence has a remarkably low ratio, which might have resulted from the fact that sexual matters are still a taboo and probably even more important than that rigid censorship is exercised upon the media content.

As for psychological violence, constant "checking-up" is the most widely form (18 %), which is closely followed by menacing (15 %). On the other hand, destruction of pets and property (9 %), intimidation and the use of unfounded accusations (equally 8,6 %), constant accompaniment (8 %), threatening physical harm to self (7 %), blackmailing and harassment (equally 6 %) forced imprisonment (4 %) and threatening to harm and/or kidnap children (2 %) have rather low ratios as seen in Fig. 2.
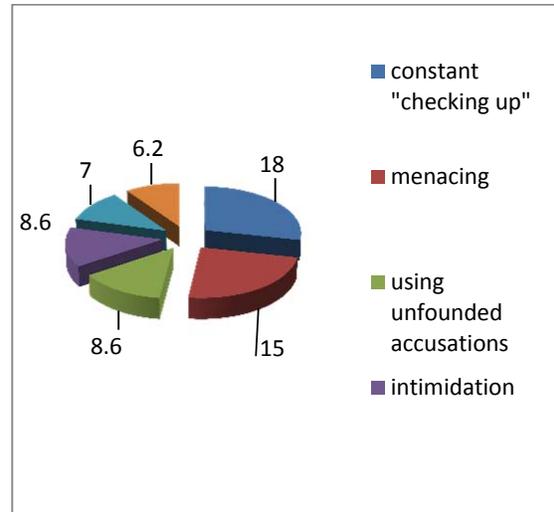

Figure 2. Forms of psychological violence

The three most widely displayed forms of violence in emotional sense are insults and put-downs (32,5 %), constant criticism (23,2 %) and repeatedly making and breaking promises (13,9 %). Furthermore, silent treatment (11.6 %), subverting a partner's relationship with the children along with forced welfare fraud (both around 7 %) and finally manipulating victim's feelings and emotions to induce guilt (4,6 %) have relatively lower, but noteworthy ratios. It should also be mentioned that belittling somebody's abilities and competency and withholding information about family running up bills for which somebody is responsible for payment are not observed at all (see Fig 3).
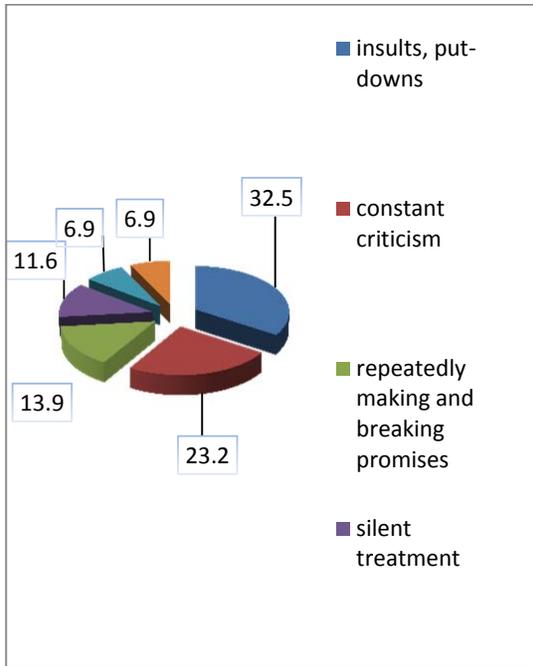
Fig. 3 Forms of emotional violence

Figure 4. Forms of economic violence

Display of violence in economic sense, which is usually around the theme of making or attempting to make someone financially dependent, has a somewhat low ratio. However, it is worth mentioning the forms of violence in this category. The highest ratio of violence in economic sense is observed in forced welfare fraud, which is followed by withholding money and/or access to money and forbidding employment especially in "man-to-woman" direction as shown in Fig. 4.
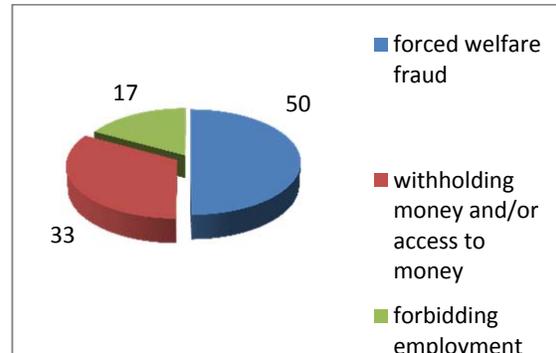
An evaluation with respect to the direction of violence is concerned; man to man violence has the highest ratio particularly in physical and psychological modes. Man to women and woman to man sorts of violence have almost equal ratios. Moreover, it should be noted that the respective type of violence is observed particularly in psychological violence. Ironically, the inequality between genders seems to have been overcome with respect to the display of violence. Child to adult harassment, not to say violence, appears through menacing, constant "checking up" and mind games, i.e., the actions and statement intended to undermine or mislead someone to gain advantage for oneself at a ratio of 3 % as seen in Fig. 5.
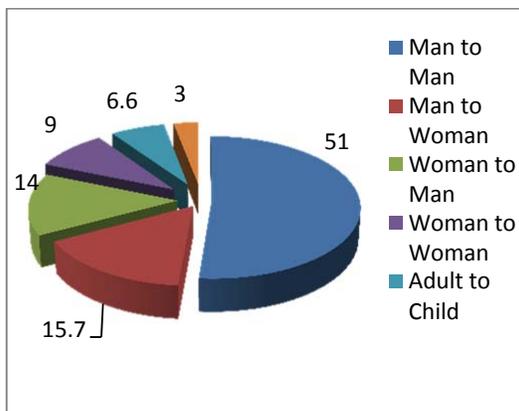
Figure 5. Direction of violence

Finally, an evaluation according to the ratio of violence (29,7 %) with respect to the whole viewing time of these serials indicate that display of violence is probably not at an alarming level, but needs serious consideration (see Fig. 6).
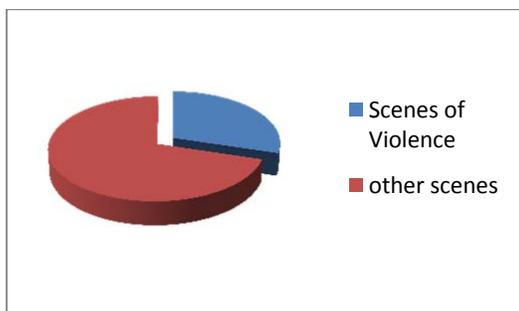

Figure 6. Ratio of violence with respect to total screen time

IV. Conclusion

Displays of violence change according to the society and the historical period. The mass media, particularly TV, plays a significant role in this process. In other words, mass communication plays a vital role in the behavioral changes in a society and the media content considerably accelerates the respective learning process through news, advertisements and particularly TV serials.

Societies are culturally influenced by what they learn from the mass media and direct their actions accordingly. Among the mass media, television appears to be the most influential means with respect to various studies conducted so far. From the news to sports and entertainment programs, the ones that influence the audience most are the TV serials according to the ratings. In Turkey, a good many serials are offered to a wide variety of audiences. Thematically, these serials are usually romantic comedies, tragedies and mafia stories.

As the main purpose of this study is just to determine the situation pertaining to the display of violence in TV serials as products of popular culture, it should be regarded as a preliminary step for a prospective audience perception analysis which will provide an opportunity to carry out an elaborate comparison.

The highest form of violence displayed in the serials within the scope of this study has appeared to be psychological

In addition, an evaluation with respect to the direction of violence is concerned; man to man violence has the highest ratio particularly in physical and psychological modes.

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Parallel to the justification of violence through the acts performed by not only the bad characters, but also the good ones, the probability of their being copied, which is particularly true especially for children and young people needs attention.

Presentation of violence through the media might generate a mental blunting about ordinary passionate reactions on vicious occasions. It might additionally prompt an absence of responsiveness towards real-life hostility.

It should be noted that the Turkish society teaches men to be tough and strong with a tinge of sensuality through a patriarchal cultural formation. Noteworthy, the TV serials play a significant role in this process. Mafia retributions and the struggle of the police against illegal affairs blended and seasoned with senti-mental stories. Thus, cultural transformation takes places more practically and effectively by means of TV serials.

ENDNOTE

[1] Statement of Daniel Schorr, Senior Correspondent, CNN p. 5 Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives Ninety-eighth Congress, First Session: Crime and Violence in the Media, Wednesday, April 13, 1983.

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